**Innovative Work by Illinois School Districts is Helping Mitigate the Teacher Shortage**

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The release of the 2022 Educator Teacher Shortage Study is a reminder that Illinois’ teacher shortage continues to be a burden on school districts.

Findings from this year’s survey conducted by the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools show 79 percent of responding districts reported an educator shortage problem, and nearly half, 45 percent, reported staffing shortages have grown worse.

While discussions at the statewide level continue to evolve, superintendents across the state have taken matters into their own hands and have begun to develop solutions at the local level to mitigate the problem. Across Illinois, school districts have formed partnerships with universities and community colleges that have aided in the development of education pathways and expanded dual-credit education courses — that transfer to teacher education — for high school students. Some districts have even looked outside of our country to fill classroom teaching roles.

By exposing students early on to a career in teaching, public school districts are planting the seed in young people that teaching is a rewarding career and providing students on-the-job training while also giving them a head start on college coursework. This boost is critical in attracting more young people to the field and fighting back negative perceptions that teaching is not a worthwhile career.

What do these programs look like? Here are three examples of innovative work currently happening:

**Peoria Public Schools:** Local aspiring educators can access tuition assistance, professional mentorship and various stipends before graduating with a board-approved teaching position in hand through the District’s Grow Your Own Program. PPS also utilizes a J1 Visa Sponsor and hired 28 international teachers from the Philippines two years ago. This month, the district oriented 10 new highly experienced international teachers from various countries in the Caribbean and Africa and will be welcoming up to 30 more from that region for the 2023-2024 school year.

**Ridgewood High School:** Students at the high school in Chicago’s west suburbs can get a head start on their education career by earning a certification/endorsement from the state of Illinois. In earning this endorsement, students complete college coursework and gain teaching methodology experience.  All of the Ridgewood students who earned the endorsement over the last three years have continued to pursue their license at a four-year institution.

**Okaw Area Vocational Center in Vandalia**: Students from 13 surrounding districts can earn college credits, develop teaching plans and gain on-the-job training that helps them explore a future career in teaching at the Okaw Area Vocational Center.

These types of innovative programs are critical in helping schools alleviate teacher shortages in their districts. However, more progress is needed at the statewide level to comprehensively address the problem.

The Illinois Association of School Administrators is a unified voice for public school superintendents and central office administrators across our state. Our members continue to report concerns relayed from teachers that the retirement age of 67 for Tier 2 educators is too late. This problem is especially stark at the pre-K and early-elementary levels.

Another concern is the high costs associated with attending a four-year university. An expansion of state and federal programs that offer full tuition waivers for people hired as teachers should be part of the mix of ideas to address the teacher shortage.

To close, the teacher shortage is a multi-faceted problem that will require a multi-faceted solution. The ideas mentioned above are only part of the answer. What remains clear is that efforts at the local level to boost the educator pipeline and retain current educators has been, and continues to be, a central component of addressing the teacher shortage.